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## THE DISSOLUTION OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE.

BY DEMETRIUS C. BOULGER.

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HOWEVER slow or intermittent the process may prove, there is no longer any reason for doubting that the dissolution of the Chinese Empire is inevitable, and that, in the least changeable land of "the changeless East," a new constitution, a new method of maintaining political life, as it were, has to be devised or discovered. China, unlike Japan, has put off the reform of her own house so long that the chance of executing it in her own manner, and without losing independence of action, has passed away irrevocably, while the problem itself as to how the three or four hundred millions of the Chinese race are to be brought into line with the rest of humanity has been rendered more difficult by international competition, and by the acute stage to which that competition has been brought through the consequences of the Japanese war. Five great powers are already in occupation of portions of Chinese territory, and it is notorious that the points acquired are regarded chiefly as bases from which further aggressions may be committed, or zones, more or less exclusive, of commercial and mining rights secured. If there were any indication of vigor in Chinese life, or even of the possession of that fatalistic courage which obtained for Turkey the other day a fresh period of existence, the presence of the aspiring inheritors

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of the Middle Kingdom at the door of the death chamber would not matter, because it would not hasten the fatal moment. But under the actual circumstances it is different. It is not merely that what has been taken has whetted the appetite for more, but that the ability to strike quickly when reparation has to be obtained for the hostility of Chinese mobs, the perversity of the mandarins, and even the sluggishness of the central government, has brought into vogue new methods of diplomacy that must accelerate the process by which China will gradually break into pieces. The murder of a missionary or a merchant, in a remote province entirely beyond the control of the central government, may now well entail the loss of a whole province and hasten the arrival of the general cataclysm.

As to how the dissolution of China will be effected, or among whom the immense carcass of the moribund empire will be divided, it is too soon to speak; but I have thought it right to place at the front of this article the main conclusion to which my study of the question has led me, and that is that the dissolution of the Chinese Empire is inevitable and not remote. It is from that point of view that I would ask the American public to consider this great question of our far East, which they are now for the first time seriously approaching from their far West, and with regard to which they cannot help being an important and perhaps a deciding factor.

At a moment when words of peace are on the lips of the masters of armed millions, it is proper to note that the change that has come over the fortunes of China is entirely due to operations of war, and that in an exceedingly short space of time it has been debased from a position of proud, and seemingly secure, isolation into one of such utter prostration and helplessness as to be the apparent prey of the first or the boldest adventurer. The Japanese war exposed the military weakness and unpreparedness of China, but the most severe blow it dealt the security of that country was in showing that there did not exist any real patriotism among its inhabitants. The American war with Spain is also not without its influence on the ultimate fate of China, for it has placed the American people in possession of the great Philippine archipelago, which will justify, and even necessitate, the United States Government in asserting a voice in the decision of China's destiny. Even international peace conferences will not secure for

China gentler treatment than she can establish a right to, and in the contest of pretensions those who would be moderate will be forced by the more exacting into measures of aggrandizement. Thus, for instance, it is clear that the British Government has reached the limit of patience with which it can regard the progress of French influence in Southern China. If France, with or without adequate cause, obtains further concessions in Kwangsi and Yunnan, England will in her turn have to secure compensation in Yunnan and Szechuen itself, so that the road of Anglo-India to the Yangtse-Kiang shall not be barred. But for China the result must be a double loss of territory and diminution of authority.

Passing from a general consideration of the question to specific points, we find that Russia enjoys a position more favorable than any other power for the absorption of large portions of Chinese territory on the dissolution of the old empire. Whereas other governments will have gravely to consider how far the acquisition of Chinese as subjects may be regarded as beneficial, or even as prudent, Russia has fear of no such questions in the early stages of her operations, for the regions that lie immediately at her disposal are thinly populated. In Kashgaria and Mongolia, Russia has to conquer an expanse of territory, and not a closely packed people; even in Manchuria there is, despite Chinese immigration of late years, no dense population. Russia knows very well that no Power is likely to make the occupation of any of those Chinese dependencies a *casus belli*, however much several Powers may insist on obtaining compensations at the expense of China for those Russian spoliation, when secured. Her decision to carry these projects into effect will depend on the stage reached by the great Trans-Siberian Railway and by her other means of communication in Asia. She has planted by sea her strong garrison at Port Arthur, but she will not be disposed to move until she has completed the railroad linking it with Europe. When she does move, we must recognize that she will not need to strike a blow for the whole of the Chinese possessions outside the Great Wall to fall into her lap. Russia will be as firmly planted on the vast trans-mural possessions of the Empire as the maritime Powers will be on the sea, when the final break-up takes place. This prospect is the more certain of realization because England has not the will or intention to prevent it, and Japan has not the power.

The possession of this exceptional position by Russia, coupled with the deflection of the Siberian railway from the original Vladivostok route to the one traversing Manchuria and Liaotung, was the root cause of China's break-up. It becomes, therefore, the imperative duty of those who have a vital interest in preventing China's becoming a Russian dependency, to neglect no means of averting so dire a calamity for the rest of humanity as would be the passing into the hands of an aggressive military power of the largest, and perhaps the finest, recruiting ground in the world. What, it may be asked, are the other States interested to do, when it is admitted that no one is likely to oppose Russia in the early stages of her operations? The answer to this question is very simple. While Russia is preparing the way for the conquest of China, those who are bound to hope for the failure of her plans can either themselves absorb some of the provinces of China, and thus anticipate her, or, better still, they can either undertake themselves the defence of China or co-operate with some new Chinese government in that object. For the execution of this arrangement it is only necessary that England, the United States and Japan should come to an agreement and form a plan for concerted action. The moment for proceeding to action has not arrived, but the hour for planning and agreeing as to what the action shall be is certainly with us.

There is the choice of two courses. We can take that of indemnifying ourselves, at the expense of China, for the ambitious acts and intentions of Russia. In that case England will take under her protectorate the provinces between Shanghai and Hankow watered by the Yangtse-Kiang; America will secure some point, perhaps Foochow or Amoy, perhaps both, and claim the hinterland; Japan will appropriate Tientsin and Pechili. In respect to a policy of indemnification, such seizures of territory would be a very solid compensation for anything Russia could obtain on her side; and, as the three countries would bind themselves to defend each other's possessions, Russia would find herself in face of a formidable triple alliance. There are, however, serious objections to this course. In the first place, the three States would voluntarily and precipitately commit themselves to a policy of conquest, which may indeed become inevitable, but for which none of them, it can truly be said, is eager. In the second place, the annexation, or even the severance from Peking, of such

large parts of Chinese territory would signify the break-up of the Empire, without giving the inhabitants of many parts of it—those provinces that would lie outside the sphere of Anglo-American-Japanese action—any better government in the place of that destroyed. Each Power would have to extend its operations over a much wider area, and to embark on adventures that it had never contemplated. The establishment of European systems of government among the millions of Chinese, by conquest, is a problem difficult and dangerous enough in itself, but practically hopeless of solution if attempted in a partial or half-hearted manner. Russia, with Oriental ways and no scruples, may be impelled to make the attempt; but even she would only succeed on the condition that she merged herself in the subjugated Chinese, at the same time that she increased their administrative efficiency and military power, without raising them to a much higher level in the scale of civilization.

For these reasons, the policy of the actual occupation of parts of China, or, to use simple words, of partial conquest, is likely to be held in reserve, until it be seen whether there are not some means of saving China by and for herself. This latter attempt can the more reasonably be put into effect because, even if it fails, it might constitute the first stage of the more vigorous and definite policy.

A policy of saving China against complete and irretrievable dissolution can only hope to meet with success by the exercise of patience, and by clearing the ground. It is quite clear that China cannot be saved by means of the existing Chinese government and Manchu dynasty. Both are hopelessly decayed and moribund. The ruling caste stands pledged to opposition to reform, and the whole of the Imperial Manchu clan is thinking of nothing but the preservation of its own privileges and allowances as a first charge on the resources of the State. The Empress Dowager is the proclaimed enemy of reform; Li Hung Chang, the champion of sham reforms, has no influence, and will never possess any again; all the Manchu princes are leagued in a solid phalanx against British influence, because under that head is classed the efforts, or at least the suggestions, being made for the regeneration of China. The young Emperor made his effort as a reformer in company with Kang Yu Wei, and it sealed his fate. When he ceases to live, a child will be placed on the throne, so that those

in power may remain undisturbed. The first point to be cleared up is that the existing government of the Manchus is beyond reclamation. It is moribund in itself, and the sooner some other institution is discovered to take its place and do its work the better it will be for China and for us. There is neither obligation nor necessity for us to contribute towards its downfall, but we have to accept the fact of its weakness and unworthiness as the justification for our search for something better in the way of an administration and a responsible government in China.

If the dynasty and existing *régime* cannot be utilized for the benefit of China's true interests, it necessarily follows that nothing can be accomplished at Peking, which is entirely in their hands. Russia will be supreme there, because her policy is to pander to the people who wish to keep China in a weak and disorganized state. To concentrate our efforts on that spot of the Chinese Empire would be to play the game of Russia, and one, moreover, from which she would be sure to emerge as victor. Peking has always been the capital chosen by a northern race of conquerors, and the national Chinese dynasties have always fixed the seat of their authority far to the south, and more often than elsewhere in the valley of the Great River. It is nearly twenty years since General Gordon advised the Chinese to transfer the capital to Nanking, which is for many reasons the best site that could be selected in China. It is central, it occupies a splendid position on the finest navigable river in the country, and it possesses traditions as the residence of the Ming dynasty which would make it a popular selection with the Chinese. The Chinese have to be encouraged to devise for themselves a new government, and the first step is to provide them with a rallying point. Shanghai, but for international claims and competitions, would be the best choice, and under all the circumstances preference must be given to Nanking. The reader must not suppose these are theoretical propositions; they are indications of what will be attempted, and I may even go so far as to say that has been begun.

If Manchu influence is supreme in the north, such is not the case in the Yangtse Valley. At Nanking and at Hankow are installed two Viceroys who are not Manchus, or the slaves of the Empress Dowager, or the tools of Russia. Liu Kun Yi and Chang Chih Tung, the Viceroys at those two places, are not perhaps the men of blood and iron of whom China stands in need, but they

are honest and well meaning, and they realize the dire straits to which their country is reduced. It is uncertain, and Lord Charles Beresford's mission has not cleared up the point, whether they have yet been brought to see that the acceptance of English advice and the co-operation of British officers furnish the best means toward insuring an improvement in the lot of the whole nation. However alarmed and anxious, they are still typical Chinese, wedded to the past; they shrink from so bold a measure as rebellion against the constituted Imperial authority. On the other hand, they know that that authority has at this moment no real value, that the young Emperor is a prisoner in his own palace, if he is not in his coffin, and that the directors of the ship of state pay no heed to its course or its security. They have also their personal grievances. Their advice has not been heeded, and their provinces have been saddled with the charge of the whole of the Anglo-German loan of sixteen millions. Notwithstanding these considerations, they may still decline to take the lead in a new movement. They are free in this matter to follow their own judgment, but they will be obliged to come to an immediate decision on the practical point submitted them—that is, the training by British officers of a small body of Chinese troops at both Hankow and Nanking. It is to the formation of such a contingent in the Yangtse Valley, at Wei Hai Wei and Hongkong, that we must look as one of the first and best means of insuring China's stability. The precedent of the Ever Victorious Army is there to show that the Chinese can be converted into excellent soldiers.

At the same time, the creation of the modest military force referred to, supplemented by a British river flotilla, is not enough for the occasion. Russia has not yet broken over the frontier, but if we wait until she has actually done so it will be too late to form any plan. The Philo-Chinese Powers, of whom England, by her position, takes the lead, are bound to be ready in good time. The contingent should be formed with regard to political considerations, as well as on a military basis. It might be made the nucleus of a political and social, as well as of a military, reform. As the force would be practically independent of the Peking authorities, it should have a distinctive badge, and none would be more effective for the immediate purpose, or for that of increasing the confidence of the Chinese in the advent of a new era, than the



selection of one that would signify a social development. For two centuries and a half the pigtail has been the badge of conquest. The new force should give up the token of defeat and subjection and, like the Taepings, be allowed, or, rather, compelled, to wear the hair long. The consequences of this simple project would be far reaching, and the reformed troops would be the forerunners of a civil reform propaganda which would include the abolition of the contortion of women's feet, and of an antiquated system of education and public examination.

Enough has been said on this branch of the subject to show that there is no necessity yet to think of the conquest of China. We have to develop the latent sources of strength in it for the purpose of its preservation, and the task need only be abandoned when experience has shown it to be futile. Two movements of an exactly opposite nature may be looked to, to accelerate the progress China will make towards either deliverance or subjection. The first is the introduction of foreign capital for the construction of railways, the working of mines, and for other public works of a remunerative or promising character. Not merely will such enterprises develop the resources of the country, but they will bring foreigners into parts of it where they would otherwise not think of going. There will certainly be a railway from Canton to the Yangtse, and another inland from Shanghai. The French say they are going to spend eight millions in a line from their Annamese possessions into Yunnan. They may carry these words into effect, but it is quite certain that their immediate consequence will be to expedite the railway from British Burmah into the same province. There is to be a great mining undertaking in two of the most important and least known provinces, Hounan and Shansi, and this will bring us into direct collision with the prejudices of the people in regard to the disturbing of cemeteries and the assumed injury of the Feng Shui, or spirits. It is probable that disorders and contests must arise from this cause, as there is no reason to suppose that the antipathy of the Chinese to foreigners has been exaggerated by the mandarins, or that they have any desire to cultivate our friendship. As it always has been, at every stage of the Chinese question, the Western races are forcing themselves on the inhabitants of China and endeavoring to wring from them the admission of the principle of equality. It is only natural to assume that experience will show the necessity of our having *points*

*d'appui* much nearer the scene of commercial or mining activity than the sea coast. Formerly, the acts of the people brought us into collision with the government, but in the future our troubles will be with the people themselves. Whatever the troubles and their consequences, one must be the tightening of the cord binding the Chinese in the family of nations.

The second accelerating cause is totally distinct from that just referred to, and is quite independent of the proceedings of foreigners. For some time past an insurrection has been simmering in the southern provinces, and from time to time the authorities at Canton have published accounts of the successes they have obtained in the field. But the insurrectionary movement continues, and it is now declared that the rebels have left Kwangsi and are marching northwards through Hounan. If this step has really been taken, it would be curious as showing how closely the present insurgents are imitating the proceedings of the Taepings half a century ago. We know very little about the resources, aims and leaders of the still unnamed rebellion, beyond the fact that the bulk of its fighting force consists of the Black Flag bands who fought so well against the French at Bacninh and Sontay. It would therefore be useless to speculate on its chances of success. But we do know that this body of armed and disaffected men is marching into provinces where the Secret Societies are most numerous and best organized, and we cannot overlook the fact that it was an alliance between similar insurgents and secret plotters which produced that Taeping rebellion, which would probably have entailed the downfall of the Manchus but for the active intervention of the Europeans and the military genius of General Gordon. The point of immediate importance is that there are in progress in China independent movements, arising from discontent or ambition, that aim at the subversion of the existing government. These have to be watched. They undoubtedly aggravate the situation and make the problem more difficult of treatment, but at the same time they may contain the germ of better things, and eventually the best, because the most natural, solution of China's troubles. From all these causes it is clear that the rate at which the internal reorganization or disorganization of affairs in China will progress is likely to accelerate, with the consequence that the action of those foreign Powers who are interested in her fate will have to be far more prompt, vigorous and decided.

It is at this juncture in a great human question that the United States of America are called upon to step into the arena and play their part like men in a difficult and dangerous contest. They may feel sure at the outset that the regulation of the Chinese question will entail strenuous action, and, it may be, considerable sacrifices on the part of those who claim, and, indeed, cannot forego, a voice in the matter. Their conquest of the Philippines is only the first step. That group of magnificent islands will, under wise administration, reward the fortunate owners. If Americans will only take as their example Sir Stamford Raffles, whose work in Java was of a very similar nature to that lying before them in the Philippines, they cannot fail to realize the value of their new possessions, and that within a brief space of time. I would the more wish to draw the attention of the great reading public of America to the career of Stamford Raffles, because he has never been appreciated in his own country. As an administrator and statesman, I do not hesitate to place him on a level with Clive and Warren Hastings, while as a philanthropist and benefactor of infirm races he stands alone among all the Pro-Consuls, past or present, of the British Empire. In four years he increased the revenue of Java seven-fold, and I have no doubt that similar methods will produce similar results in the Philippines. I published, little more than twelve months ago, a detailed biography of Sir Stamford Raffles, with much unpublished official correspondence; but, although no book could have been more extensively or more uniformly commended, it has hitherto met with only a *succès d'estime*. Sir Stamford Raffles is not yet one of the heroes of the British public; he is a neglected worthy. Perhaps it is reserved for the American people, who are planting their feet on the skirts of that archipelago where his genius soared supreme, to place him on his true pedestal.

The possession of the Philippines, which the American people are never likely to allow to become such a *damnosa hereditas* as Formosa is proving for the Japanese, will not merely entitle, but will even oblige, the Americans to participate actively in the settlement of Chinese affairs. At first that participation will no doubt be confined to the moral support of Great Britain in its endeavor to keep the commercial field open for the whole world, and at the same time to prevent a great military power like Russia from acquiring the control of the vast resources of China, with which

she would have no difficulty in obtaining the mastery of the world. On the same side in this alliance, formed for no selfish or excluding purpose, would be and is Japan, the country destined, no one can doubt, to civilize and reform Corea. In the early phases of the question England and Japan will necessarily have to take the lead; but their action will be inspired by greater confidence, and will prove more efficacious in the result, if it is assured that they enjoy the moral support and diplomatic co-operation of the United States, and that when the need arises there will be naval co-operation too.

The natural development of the latent resources of China will offer abundant and profitable opportunities for the capital of both America and England. Each country has an equal interest in preventing their diminution or contraction. Neither can tolerate the idea that Russia is to be allowed to establish her right to regard China as her preserve. Travellers bring back from Russia the tale that all intelligent Russians, with scarcely an exception, do not conceal their hope and their conviction that they will seize the whole of Asia. Peter the Great aspired to conquer India and to control the wealth of China. His descendants are even more ambitious and insatiable. Nothing less than the whole of Asia will suffice, even if a hollow peace conference is necessary to procure for them the halting place needed for the final and irretraceable spring.

The American people are entering into the contest of commercial and political equity—I will not use the hackneyed phrase of supremacy—in China at a highly interesting moment. Not merely is the problem, which has been more or less on the carpet since the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, in a most interesting phase, but the period cannot be far remote when the momentous decision will have to be made as to the point at which the further progress of Russia will have to be arrested. The advent of that crisis is inevitable. Let it not find those who would suffer by the triumph of Russia unprepared. In the temporary break-up of the Chinese Empire, which is inevitable, Russia can appropriate a vast expanse of territory without risk, because the population is scanty, and the only obstacle in her path will be the space she has to cover. But such successes will leave the real Chinese question untouched. There is still time left to approach it deliberately and to solve it in a worthy manner. The dissolution of the

Chinese Empire, which I foresee, and with regard to which I have offered a few suggestions, is one that, if we are wise and vigilant, need not prove more than temporary—a passing episode in the life of the oldest state in the world; and perhaps it might even turn out the means of solidifying and strengthening that empire. The object of Americans and Englishmen should remain as long as possible the saving of China from foreign annexation. Let it break in pieces if it must, but let each of us preserve the fragments, so that in time some true Chinese reformer and leader may rivet them together once more. That will be an honorable and a safe policy. If it does not work, we must try another; but until we have tried it we cannot pronounce it a failure. It should not be a failure if Russia is indeed the only wolf preying on the Chinese fold, for then the dogs could easily keep her off.

DEMETRIUS C. BOULGER.